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Date 23 May 1991

Webster: U.S. intelligence played crucial role in war

By Bill Gertz
 THE WASHINGTON TIMES

U.S. intelligence agencies helped to track terrorists and thwarted major international attacks during the Persian Gulf war, CIA Director William Webster said yesterday.

Mr. Webster, who announced his retirement earlier this month, defended U.S. intelligence agencies for their contributions in supporting political and military efforts before, during and after the Gulf war.

Saddam Hussein's threat to launch terrorist actions around the world posed one of the most serious challenges, he said.

"We knew that he had sent out a number of teams with plans to attack," Mr. Webster said in a speech. "But we also knew it wouldn't do much good to merely chase the person who lit the bomb."

The speech was delivered last night in New York City to the Amherst College Association. The text of Mr. Webster's remarks was made available here.

Intelligence agencies tried to block terrorist actions, so the CIA's counterterrorism center tracked terrorists worldwide and provided warnings of possible attacks, he said.

The deportation of suspected terrorists from some countries he did not identify contributed to the tight security during the war.

"These timely, coordinated countermeasures clearly helped prevent major terrorist attacks during the crisis," Mr. Webster said.

U.S. spy agencies also monitored international compliance with United Nations sanctions against Iraq and provided "intelligence leads" that resulted in "hundreds" of official State Department com-



CIA Director William Webster

plaints to nations suspected of violating the embargo, he said.

On the battlefield, intelligence agencies provided "the most detailed and precise order of battle information any American commander has ever enjoyed," the CIA chief said.

Intelligence from what Mr. Webster described as "highly sensitive sources," a term often used to describe electronic intercepts, helped allied forces to destroy most of Iraq's command and control structure.

Iraqi military leaders were so disoriented because of the loss of command and control, for example, that they had no idea how many of their

troops had fled into Saudi Arabia.

The allies had stopped counting at 60,000 troops, Mr. Webster said.

Currently, intelligence agencies are assisting relief efforts for Iraqi Kurds while continuing to monitor internal developments inside Iraq, he said.

The CIA also will monitor Iraq's pledge to destroy its chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles with a range greater than 93 miles, Mr. Webster said.

"Our military, in conjunction with the allied forces, performed magnificently in the Persian Gulf war," Mr. Webster said. "Casualties were low, and this was largely due to the military's extraordinary precision. Intelligence had an important role in helping the military pinpoint targets and making that precision possible."

On other topics, Mr. Webster said he is leaving the CIA after four years with confidence the agency can deal with the challenges of the 1990s, including weapons proliferation, economic competitiveness, counterintelligence and narcotics control.

Mr. Webster said "myriad intelligence organizations" currently are seeking to acquire our most sensitive military and industrial secrets and are illegally acquiring embargoed technology.

"The outstanding performance of American weapons in the Gulf war — with their incredible precision — has made our high-tech arms industry even more attractive to those seeking our technology, and the KGB remains the most aggressive of them," Mr. Webster said.

"In terms of sheer numbers alone, the KGB exceeds the combined security forces of Europe, America, and much of Asia, and its enormous presence helps it collect what it needs," he said.